

# City, JPL reach water cleanup deal

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PASADENA — City and Jet Propulsion Laboratory officials have reached "a verbal understanding" over JPL's role in paying the multimillion dollar cost of cleaning up groundwater believed to have been polluted by the laboratory in the 1950s and 1960s, City Manager Don McIntyre said Wednesday.

The deal tentatively was approved by the Pasadena Board of City Directors on Tuesday in a closed-door session, but neither side would release any details, saying the agreement still must be committed to writing by the two institutions' legal and technical staffs before it can be made public.

"Now we've got to work out details," JPL general counsel Donald Fowler said.

After more than two years of study, city officials are ready to begin designing a cleanup plant, but are awaiting an agreement with JPL before they proceed.

Such a plant, which would use carbon to filter out the the potentially cancer-causing chemicals from the water, could cost anywhere from \$2.3 million to \$4 million, with an additional \$478,500 to \$866,000 per year to operate the system, according to a study conducted for the city.

Currently, four city wells in the area south of JPL have been shut down because of potential-

ly dangerous levels of carbon tetrachloride, perchloroethylene and trichloroethylene, three chemicals used as industrial solvents and linked to cancer.

Traces of the chemicals in the wells were first discovered in January 1980, but they did not rise above state-mandated safety levels until 1985, when the first city well had to be shut down as the pollutants moved south through the underground aquifer.

The aquifer, like a giant underground sponge, is important to Pasadena because it provides about 40 percent of the city's water.

The city has studied the option of abandoning the wells and buying more water imported from the Colorado River and Northern California, but it would be more costly and would allow the pollutants to continue moving south underground, contaminating more wells as they go.

According to a study funded jointly by the city and JPL, the pollutants are likely to have come from chemicals dumped by the laboratory in the 1950s and 1960s in cesspools and pits near the east end of the facility.

The study did not explicitly name JPL as the culprit, and the NASA-funded facility has never formally admitted blame, but has helped pay for the cleanup studies that have been going on since 1986.